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ABSTRACT

The Spanish psychological verb construction seems to be especially difficult for native English-speaking learners to acquire. Since some of the most common Spanish psych verbs, such as "gustar" (to please) and "encantar" (to delight), require a grammatical structure that is different from that of the English verbs frequently taken as their equivalents "to like" and "to love," it is understandable that native English speakers may struggle with the construction. This study presents data that describe the patterns of usage of students (n=105) in first-, second-, third-, and fourth-semester university-level Spanish courses. Each completed three descriptive writing tasks, which were analyzed for error patterns. Analysis identified three major error types: omission of preposition "a" (to) when inclusion is required; several object pronoun errors; and verb morphology errors. Results suggest that learners initially commit errors related to transfer of structures from the first language. Gradually, however, transfer errors decline and developmental errors increase as learners experiment with elements of the target language. It is proposed that within this learning pattern, it is possible to discern distinct stages in learners' progress toward acquisition. Contains 18 references. (Author/MSE)

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The Spanish Psych Verb Construction: Beginning and Intermediate Learners' Patterns of Usage

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The Spanish Psych Verb Construction: Beginning and Intermediate Learners' Patterns of Usage

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The Spanish psychological verb construction seems to be especially difficult for native English-speaking learners to acquire. Since some of the most common Spanish psych verbs, such as gustar *'to please' and* encantar *'to delight,' require a grammatical structure that is different from that of the English verbs frequently taken as their equivalents 'to like' and 'to love,' it is understandable that native English speakers may struggle with the construction. More precise information on how learners attempt to acquire this complex form would, however, prove valuable to Spanish instructors. This study presents data that describe the patterns of usage of students in first-, second-, third-, and fourth-semester university-level Spanish courses. An analysis of the data reveals that learners initially commit errors related to the transfer of structures from the native language. Gradually, however, transfer errors decline and developmental errors increase as learners experiment with elements of the target language. The study proposes that within this learning pattern, it is possible to discern distinct stages in the learners' progress toward acquisition.*

INTRODUCTION

Gustar and other psychological verbs present a challenge to native English speakers attempting to learn Spanish. Since the "psych verb" construction requires the learners to discern subject and beneficiary (or sufferer) in an inverted word order and to use the proper indirect object pronoun, the learners struggle to acquire this structure. It is thus of interest to instructors to know more about how learners develop their understanding of this construction so that they may be better able to formulate effective strategies for facilitating the acquisition process. This study addresses the following questions in an effort to achieve a clearer understanding of learners' acquisition of the Spanish psych verb construction:

1. What are the patterns of usage typical of learners attempting to acquire psych verbs such as *gustar* 'to please,' *importar* 'to matter,' *encantar* 'to delight,' *molestar* 'to bother,' and *interesar* 'to interest'? How do the learning patterns of students at beginning levels compare to those of intermediate students?

2. How can we account for the performance of the learners?

3. Does the acquisition of the psych verb construction reflect stages of interlanguage development?

Though it is beyond the scope of this study to recommend specific techniques for teaching the Spanish psych verb construction, it is hoped that the data and analysis presented here may assist instructors in finding effective ways to help learners acquire the structure.

It is possible for any Spanish instructor to make certain general predictions about how learners will handle the psych verb construction. First, it is expected that, overall, learners will experience difficulty in managing this construction. According to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Ellis, 1990, p. 25), the more closely a structure in the target language (L2) corresponds to its equivalent expression in the native language (L1), the easier it will be to learn, and vice versa. Since many of the most common English psych verb constructions (*like, love, am interested in*) utilize a "direct" structure while their equivalent expressions in Spanish (*gustar, encantar, interesar*) require a "reverse" construction [1], we may expect students to struggle with the form generally.

Second, it may be predicted that, due to frequency of occurrence in input (VanPatten, 1987, p. 87; Ellis, 1990, p. 96) and according to the output hypothesis (Ellis, pp. 117-119) and the discourse hypothesis (Ellis, pp. 119-121), learners will be more proficient in discussing their own likes and dislikes than in describing those of friends or parents. The first-person construction seems to be the one learners hear and are asked to produce most often in beginning and intermediate Spanish classes; thus, they should perform it best.

Third, it is generally expected that students at higher levels will outperform those at lower levels in all tasks. Results should suggest that students improve their psych verb proficiency as they advance from level to level.

Certain common errors may also be predicted. We can expect L1 transfer of the English word order S-V-O [2], leading learners to confuse the Spanish subject and object and commit errors like **me gusto la música* 'to me I am pleasing the music' [3]. We may also see the common developmental error of the use of *se* instead of the proper indirect object pronouns *le* or *les*.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Though psych verbs have been of interest to linguists studying comparative syntax and relational grammar, they have received little attention from second language acquisition researchers. Most of the literature on the subject of psych verbs focuses on the debate over the formal characterization of the construction; in particular, of its transitive properties. Though the increasingly more detailed definitions of transitivity that this debate has produced may help second language instructors systematize their own conceptions of how the various types of psych verbs work, it is doubtful that these definitions will prove to be of any practical use in teaching basic psych verb constructions to beginning learners. Nevertheless, these studies have established a basic lexicon that is helpful to any discussion on the subject. Thus, a brief review of some definitive studies, with an emphasis on the terminology they

use, is appropriate before proceeding to an explanation of the present study.

Belletti and Rizzi (1988) first distinguish between the *experiencer*, which is "the individual experiencing the mental state," and the *theme*, which is "the content or object of the mental state" (p. 292). They then postulate three distinct types of psych verb constructions based on Italian syntax. The first type of construction casts the experiencer into the role of the deep-structure subject and the theme into the accusative role. This psych verb configuration is the most canonical and is exemplified by the verb *temere*. In the second type of construction, exemplified by *preoccupare*, the theme is considered a "derived subject," while the experiencer is the accusative object. The third type of construction, exemplified by *piacere*, works in the same way, except that the experiencers are assigned dative status: they are the indirect beneficiary, rather than the direct recipient, of the effect.

The Belletti and Rizzi article has provoked a series of criticisms, revisions, and refinements by other relational and Chomskyan grammarians of its classification of the roles of experiencer and theme in the various psych constructions (Bouchard, 1992; Masullo, 1992; Saltarelli, 1992; Herschensohn, 1992; and Whitley, 1995) [4]. Of all of these, Whitley's study of transitivity is most pertinent to the present study. He first translates Belletti and Rizzi's tripartite conceptualization of Italian psych verbs into a Spanish version that features a four-part typology. The terminology he uses is different from theirs; while he accepts the term *experiencer* from their study, he prefers *cause* to their *theme*. In addition, he distinguishes between *direct* verbs, which cast the experiencer as subject (as in *I like it*), and *reverse* verbs, which treat the experiencer as object (as in *it pleases me*). Using these distinctions, he explains the four types of psych verbs:

> Type 1: Direct transitive; for example, *desear*. The experiencer acts as the subject, the cause as direct object.
>
> Type 2: Direct intransitive; for example, *gozar de/en*. The experiencer acts as subject, and the cause as an "oblique object" of a verb-specific preposition.
>
> Type 3: Reverse intransitive; for example, *gustar*. The experiencer is the indirect object, and the cause is cast as subject. The indirect object is optional: the experiencer may be generalized or impersonal, as in *La música rock gusta en todas partes*.
>
> Type 4: Reverse transitive; for example, *fascinar*. The cause functions as subject; the experiencer acts as the direct object. (573-574)

Whitley goes on to show, however, that such rigid syntactical categories break down when we analyze Spanish psych verbs more closely, and he proposes instead the idea of a transitivity "squish" based on se-

mantic distinctions. He borrows this term from John Ross (1973), who used it to describe a continuum of noun phrase types. He also utilizes a list of ten features proposed by Hopper and Thompson (1980) as a gauge of transitivity. He concludes with a call for other pedagogical explanations of *gustar* verbs that are more representative of the complexities of psych constructions, claiming that such work "would be especially valuable in second language acquisition" (p. 582).

There is little evidence, however, that comprehensive metalinguistic explanations of concepts such as transitivity facilitate beginning and intermediate learners' acquisition of basic psych verbs. It is more likely that input, output, and interactive activities have a greater effect on learners' mastery of psych verb constructions. Nevertheless, relational grammar does provide terminology and an explanation of the framework of psych configurations that are fundamental to any study of the concept.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

The first step in understanding better how learners attempt to acquire this complex construction is that of gathering and analyzing samples of their usage. The purpose of this pilot study has been to generate examples of the use of Spanish psych verbs by beginning and intermediate learners, to compare the performance of learners at different levels, and to look for patterns of usage that might suggest stages of interlanguage development.

Subjects

The subjects of the study were students in four University of Texas at Austin Spanish classes: 23 S1 (beginning level - first semester Spanish) students, 26 S2 (second semester Spanish) students, 36 S3 (third semester Spanish) students, and 20 S4 (fourth semester Spanish) students. At the time of data collection, the S1 students had been introduced to the verb *gustar* and had practiced its use to describe their own likes and dislikes. The use of *gustar* in third person constructions had not been emphasized, though it occasionally appeared in input. The students had not worked with other psych verbs, but they were informed at the time of the experiment that the other psych verbs, like *importar*, *encantar*, *molestar*, and *interesar*, worked generally like the verb *gustar* (that is, they feature a reverse structure).

The students in S2 had been introduced to some psych verbs other than *gustar* and had reviewed direct and indirect object pronouns. It is assumed that they also had some practice in the use of reverse constructions through studying the use of the subjunctive after expressions of emotion, such as *me sorprende que* or *me molesta que*.

The instructor of the S3 students had given little explicit attention to psych verbs in class, though the construction was recycled in input and output with some frequency.

The students in S4 had reviewed *gustar*-type verbs in a unit dedicated explicitly to the subject 10

class days prior to the experiment. In addition, instructors of fourth-semester Spanish emphasize this construction as essential to one of the seven communicative goals of the course, the expression of likes and dislikes.

Instrument

The learners completed three written tasks:

Task 1: Describe your own likes and dislikes.
Task 2: Describe a friend's likes and dislikes.
Task 3: Describe your parents' likes and dislikes.

They were instructed to vary their selection of verb and to choose from among the verbs *gustar, importar, encantar, interesar,* and *molestar*. The task was designed to generate samples of usage of psych verbs requiring reverse structure that were taught at most of the levels with the indirect object pronouns *me, le,* and *les*. The task called for a variety of verbs in order to ensure that performance would be particular to the psych verb construction and not simply to one or two specific verbs.

The percentage of correct responses (relative to the total number of attempts at the target structure made) was computed for each of the three tasks at each of the four levels. If the student made no error in conjugating the verb, selecting the correct object pronoun, or including the preposition *a* when appropriate, the sentence was judged as correct. Other errors, such as those in spelling or use of subjunctive/indicative, were disregarded.

Types of errors were also noted. They fell into three main categories, two of which have subcategories:

1. Omission of the preposition *a* 'to' when inclusion is required
   (1) Example: **Mi amigo no le interesa limpiar la casa* 'My friend does not interest cleaning the house.' The preposition *a* should precede *mi amigo*.

2. Object pronoun errors

   A. Omission of object pronouns *me* 'to me,' *le* 'to him/her,' or *les* 'to them' when inclusion is required
      (2) Example: **A mi amigo encanta comer* 'Eating delights to my friend.' The direct object pronoun *le* should precede *encanta*.

   B. Use of reflexive pronoun *se* instead of the correct object pronouns *le* 'to him/her' or *les* 'to them'
      (3) Example: **A José no se importa la clase* 'The class does not matter itself to José.' The pronoun *le* should be used instead of *se*.

   C. Confusion of object pronouns *le* 'to him/her' and *les* 'to them'
      (4) Example: **A mis padres le gusta la comida buena* 'Good food is pleasing to him to my parents.' The pronoun *les* should be used instead of *le*.

3. Verb morphology errors

   A. Subject-object confusion
      (5) Example: **Mis padres gustan ir al cine* 'My parents are pleasing to go to the movies.'

   B. Use of singular verb for plural subject (cause)
      (6) Example: **A ellos les gusta las fresas* 'The strawberries is pleasing to them.'

The first two categories are self-explanatory. With regard to verb morphology errors, subject-object confusion was judged as having occurred when (a) the form of the verb agreed with the form of the object pronoun instead of with the subject (cause), and (b) a check of other responses by the same student confirmed that this error was repeated consistently and systematically in other situations. For example, an S2 student performing Task 3 wrote these four sentences:

(7) **Mis padres gustan con yo estudio* 'My parents please with I study'

(8) *Les gustan mis amigos* 'They like my friends'

(9) **No les gustan con yo hago gradas mal* 'They are not pleasing to them with I make bad [grades]'

(10) **Les encantan mí* 'To them they delight me'

Since the student used the third-person plural conjugation in all cases regardless of what the cause (subject) was, it remains clear that he took the experiencers, his parents, to be the subject of the verb; thus, Examples (7), (9), and (10) would be recorded as subject-object confusion errors. Although the student might not have fully understood the construction of (8), the sentence is nevertheless structurally correct; thus, it was not marked as an error. The frequency of each of these types of errors was calculated for each task at each level.

These data enable a comparison of the performance of the learners from level to level. Based on this information, one may describe "profiles" of each of the four levels with respect to proficiency in the use of psych verbs. These profiles indicate general performance and the types of errors most common to each level.

RESULTS

Figure 1 summarizes the overall performances of each of the classes in each of the tasks. These data help to formulate an answer to the first research question posed: What are the patterns of usage typical of learners attempting to acquire psych verbs such as *gustar, importar, encantar, molestar,* and *interesar*? How do the learning patterns of students at beginning levels compare to those of intermediate students?

Task 1: Describing One's Own Likes and Dislikes

All levels performed this task with a relatively high degree of accuracy ranging from 75% in S1 to 93% in S3. Generally, each level tended to perform slightly better than the

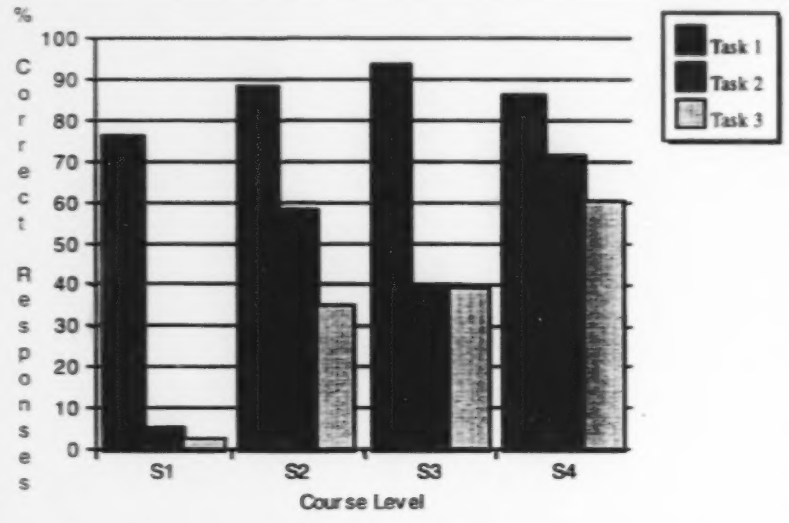

Figure 1. Summary of Overall Performance

previous level with the exception of the S4 class, which scored an 86%. The 7% difference between this class and the S3 class cannot, however, be considered significant since the sampling of responses generated by the S4 class numbered only half that of the S3 and S2 classes. Figure 2 shows the frequency of the three general types of errors that occurred in Task 1: omission of the preposition *a*, object pronoun errors, and verb morphology errors. No errors occurred with the preposition *a* because students avoided the emphatic *a mí* 'to me.' The pronoun *me* 'to me' was consistently used correctly. Conjugation errors were the only significant type of mistake committed in Task 1. It is of interest to note that the most common type of verb morphology error in S1 was that of subject-object confusion, which occurred with a 15% frequency. Such an error may take, for example, the following form:

(11) **Molesto la clase de inglés*
'I bother the English class'

This type of error gradually disappears, however; it occurred with only a 2% frequency in S4.

Task 2: Describing a Friend's Likes and Dislikes

Accuracy in the performance of this task trails behind that demonstrated

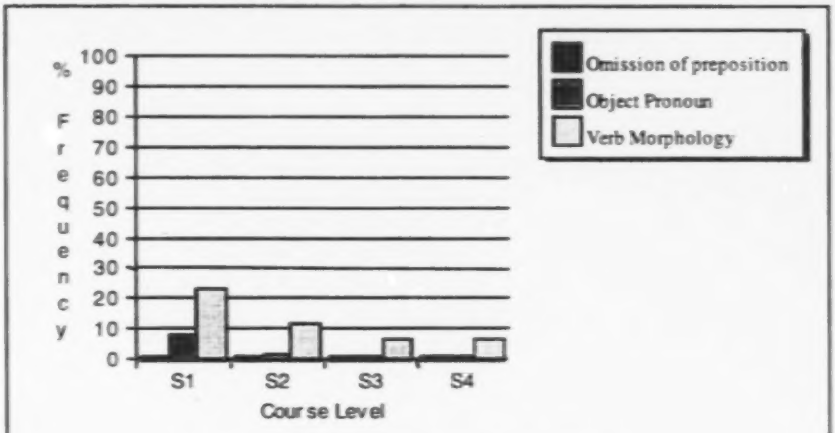

Figure 2. Task 1 Error Types

in Task 1, as seen in Figure 1. Nevertheless, the general trend again seems to be one of improved performance at higher levels, with the exception of the S3 class, which was actually outperformed by the S2 class. There is a marked difference between no proficiency with this construction in S1 to 58% accuracy in S2. This result is not surprising, given that the S1 class had had little exposure to this form or to object pronouns, while the S2 class had been instructed explicitly in third-person constructions with psych verbs other than *gustar* and had reviewed direct and indirect objects. The reason for the drop in performance at the S3 level may be that little explicit attention is given to psych verbs in the chapters of the textbook covered in this semester, nor did the instructor of the course report any review or practice of the construction other than an occasional recycling in communicative activities. The 71% accuracy score of the S4 class suggests that they benefited from the review chapter on *gustar*-like verbs they had recently completed.

Across all levels, the omission of the preposition *a* accounted for the greatest number of errors, as Figure 3 shows. Though the S2 class shows an exceptionally low frequency of this error, the general trend is one of slow improvement as levels increase. Object pronoun errors are less frequent overall and follow a definite trend of improved performance at higher levels. It is interesting to note that omission of the pronoun is the most common type of pronoun error in S1 (24% frequency), but that its occurrence dwindles to 15% in S2 and to approximately 7% in the S3 and S4

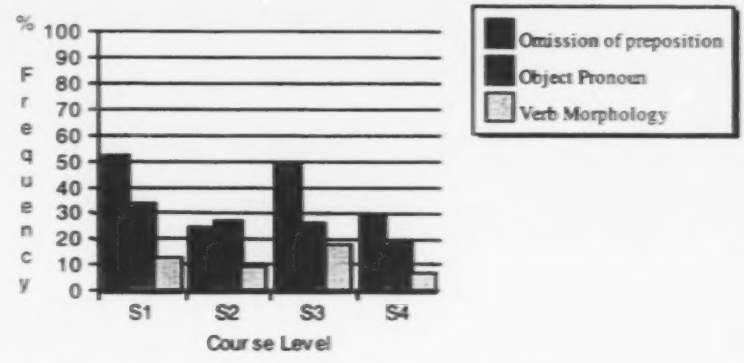

Figure 3. Task 2 Error Types

classes, while at the same time the frequency of *se* interference errors rises from 5% and 8% in S1 and S2 to nearly 20% in S3 before disappearing completely in S4.

Task 3: Describing Your Parents' Likes and Dislikes.

At all levels, accuracy in Task 3 was the lowest of the three. As with the other tasks, however, the trend is one of improved performance at higher levels, with the S4 class reaching a 60% success rate (see Figure 1). Figure 4 shows the frequency of the three general kinds of errors that occurred in Task 3. As in Task 2, omission of *a* is the most persistent error; it seems to occur with about the same frequency here as it did in the second task, and it never improves to less than a 30% rate of appearance. Control of verb morphology and choice of correct object pronoun improve dramatically from 100% error frequency in S1 to 10% and less in S4. Especially noteworthy again is the complete disappearance of *se* for *les* at the S4 level, while it occurred with 51% frequency in S1 and 11% frequency in both S2 and S3.

ANALYSIS

General Performance

We now address the second research question: How can we account for the performance of the learners?

The results generally affirm the expectations outlined in the first section of this paper. It was stated that the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis would lead us to believe that the

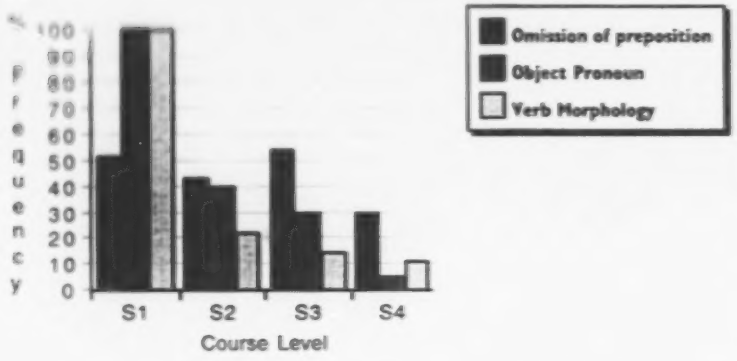

Figure 4. Task 3 Error Types

psych verb structure would be somewhat challenging for the English-speaking learner. The experiment confirms this idea. Though learners seem to come increasingly closer to acquisition of the form in Task 1, results suggest that many learners still will not have acquired the ability to use psych verbs correctly in third-person constructions even after two years of Spanish classes.

The expectation that higher level students would outperform lower level students was generally fulfilled by the data. Two exceptions to this trend did occur, however, at the S4 level in Task 1 and at the S3 level in Task 2. The first of these, as stated, does not constitute a numerically significant decline, while the second may be accounted for by the fact that the third-semester students received no review or practice exclusively dedicated to the concepts, as did the S2 students. It was mentioned that they were occasionally called upon to recycle the psych verb structure in communicative activities, but in such situations learners would more than likely be called upon to comment on their own likes, as in Task 1. This would explain how S3 students outperformed S2 students in Task 1, but not in Task 2.

The study also confirmed the prediction that learners would master Task 1 more easily than the other tasks. It was mentioned that any or all of the frequency, output, or discourse hypotheses could serve to explain this result. *Me gusta* is the form learners hear and produce most often. Furthermore, it is more likely to serve learners' discourse needs better than the other forms; that is, they are more likely to en-

gage in discourses that call upon them to discuss their own likes and dislikes, rather than someone else's. A related idea is that of communicative utility. VanPatten (1987) suggests that as long as a beginning learner believes that a linguistic feature has little communicative value, it will not be used and, therefore, will not be acquired until later. Perdue and Klein (1992) make a similar point that if certain elements of a learner's speech do not grammaticalize, it is because they are meeting their communicative needs without mastery of those elements and feel little need to change. Either of these versions of the communicative value idea would serve well to explain why the learners in this study show more mastery over Task 1 than Tasks 2 or 3.

Stages of Interlanguage Development

The third question posed at the outset of this study concerned the possibility of stages of interlanguage development. While a longitudinal study would be necessary to affirm any proposed order of acquisition, this pilot study may at least suggest a possible outline of certain stages learners pass through as they develop their analysis and control of psych verb constructions.

While performance analysis gives us a general idea of where learners are in their development toward acquisition, error analysis may help reveal some of the cognitive processes that are going on at the same time. Figure 5 shows the frequency in all three tasks of four different types of errors that were not shown in Figures 2 through 4 because they are subcategories of those three general error types. The first two types of errors listed in the legend, omission of the object pronoun and subject/object confusion, can be considered transfer-type errors. According to the Naive Lexical Hypothesis (Lafford and Ryan, 1995), English-speaking beginners attempt to build their Spanish sentences word for word from the English direct structure. Thus they produce sentences like *Ellos encantan su perro* in an attempt to express 'They love their dog.' Since the English utterance contains no object pronoun, the beginners omit it. They have also transferred English S-V-O word order, which produces in the Spanish a subject-object confusion error. Thus, these two types of errors can be understood to be symptomatic of L1 transfer.

The other two types of errors, the use of the reflexive pronoun *se* instead of the indirect object pronouns *me*, *le*, or *les*, and the use of *le* instead of *les* and vice-versa, are not related to transfer because these pronouns, for the most part, do not have English equivalents when used in psych verb constructions. They indicate, rather, that the learner is trying to develop hypotheses about how features particular to Spanish are used correctly. They may be called, then, developmental errors.

This distinction between transfer and developmental errors may help to define different cognitive stages of development in the learning of psych verbs. Figure 5 shows that errors prompted by L1 transfer occur with greater frequency at the S1 and S2 levels, while in S3 and S4, developmental errors are more fre-

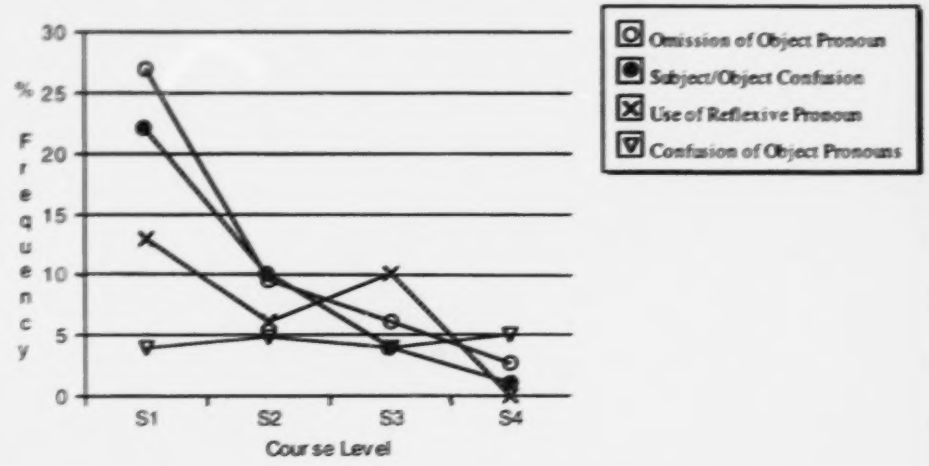

Figure 5. Frequency of Transfer and Developmental Errors

quent and transfer errors decline. In other words, when first confronted with the psych verb construction, the S1 students' interlanguage could be described in terms of Selinker's (1972) restructuring continuum, wherein the learners transfer L1 parameter settings to the L2. This stage could then be called the "transfer stage." In S2, it seems that the actual restructuring begins to take place: transfer error frequency decreases dramatically as the learners make adjustments to their interlanguage where they see that the L2 is different from the L1. This period might be called the "restructuring stage." At the S3 level we see that transfer errors become less frequent than developmental errors; here, then, the interlanguage resembles Corder's (1978) continuum of development, wherein learners rely more on L2 input than on L1 transfer to help set the parameters of the L2. This phase, then, is the first developmental stage. A significant finding at the S4 level was that *se* errors disappeared completely. This development would seem to mark an important step forward; students have learned to separate the *se* they use with reflexives, reciprocals, and double object pronouns from the *le* and *les* that are pertinent to the psych construction. Since learners at this level seem to have progressed developmentally, we may call this the second developmental stage.

Level Profiles

These stages may be combined with the patterns of usage described earlier to give us four profiles that

characterize early levels of progress toward acquisition of the psych verb construction. The descriptions will also serve to summarize the most significant findings of the study in general.

Transfer Stage: Learners at this level demonstrate proficiency with the *me gusta(n)* construction, but none with the *le/les gusta(n)* structures. A number of errors stem from attempts to transfer L1 parameters directly to the L2.

Restructuring Stage: Learners at this stage show increased proficiency with *me gusta* and a marked improvement over first-stage learners in the use of *le/les gusta*. They begin to realize that they cannot simply map structures from their L1 onto the L2. They start to adjust the mistakenly transferred parameters they had previously tried to follow. As they search for concepts to replace their previous hypotheses, they begin paying more attention to L2 input.

Developmental Stage I: Frequency of transfer errors is greatly reduced. Learners reach even greater mastery over the *me gusta* form, and they experiment actively with features particular to the L2 in an effort to form hypotheses concerning the *le/les gusta* forms. Recall may fail them here if there is no regular reinforcement of this structure. *Se* interference increases.

Developmental Stage II: When *se* is ruled out as an alternative to the object pronouns used in the psych verb structure, a new developmental stage begins. Control of verb morphology and choice of object pronoun is as high as it has ever been, though hypothesis formation based on L2 input continues. Transfer errors nearly disappear. Acquisition of the psych verb construction, at least as it is used in the first person singular and the third person, seems within reach.

LIMITATIONS

Of course, the findings of this pilot study are tentative because they were gathered synchronically; a longitudinal study following individual learners through their first four semesters of Spanish would provide stronger evidence of any order of acquisition observed. Oral interviews would also be a better indicator of degree of acquisition; the form-focused written tasks used for this study may have prompted greater control and monitoring than would be possible in a more meaning-focused interview. It would also allow for negotiation of meaning, which would ensure more uniform generation of samples: many students misunderstood the directions to the second task in this experiment and wrote about their friends' collective preferences rather than about one friend's likes and dislikes. Finally, it would be of interest to compare this study's results with those of an investigation of learners in natural environments to see if there is any relation between their 'stages' and those proposed here.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Given that learners at all levels demonstrate a relatively high level

of competence with the first-person singular form of the Spanish psych verb construction and a relatively low level of competence with the third person forms, instructors may wish to consider how much reinforcement is being given to a given task type at each level. Though it is understandable that teachers may naturally call on students to perform tasks in the first person since one's expression of one's own likes or dislikes is a common communicative function, instructors may want to consider giving more reinforcement to third person forms as well. If we think of *me gusta* as the unmarked, canonical form of the psych verb structure, and of *le/les gusta* as the marked forms, then perhaps we should spend more time reinforcing the latter, if, as Guntermann (1992) and Rutherford (1982) maintain, instruction in more marked features can facilitate acquisition of less marked features, while instruction in less marked features may result in learners simplifying their interlanguages.

In the third person constructions, errors in the use of indirect objects and elements related to them, such as the preposition *a* 'to,' are more persistent than verb morphology errors. This seems to suggest that, whether as a result of instruction or of their own independent cognitive processes, learners seem to prioritize the elements in the Spanish psych verb construction. They attempt to control the most communicative and most easily translatable items first, such as the effect (verb) in question and its cause (the subject). Learners appear to give less attention, at least initially, to less easily translatable, more subtle forms, such as indirect object pronouns and the preposition *a*, which operate on L2, rather than L1, principles.

Such findings lead to certain questions regarding the instruction of the psych verb construction. First, is it possible to determine precisely what makes learners shift from a strategy that attempts to acquire L2 forms by restructuring familiar L1 forms to a strategy that recognizes the L2 forms as different from the L1 and seeks knowledge of its principles? Second, is it desirable for an instructor to attempt to facilitate such a shift in the learner's consciousness? If so, at what moment in the learner's progress should the instructor make such an attempt? If not, are there other ways in which instructors should adjust their sequence of instruction of the psych verb structure, given the sequence of learner acquisition hypothesized in this study? Answers to these questions would further enable instructors to better facilitate native English speakers' acquisition of the Spanish psych verb construction.

NOTES:

1 These terms, borrowed from Whitley (995), are defined in the next section.

2 VanPatten (1987) discusses a similar type of L1 transfer in the L2 acquisition of *ser* and *estar*.

3 Throughout this study, an asterisk indicates that the example provided is grammatically incorrect.

4 These theorists offer various interpretations of psych verb constructions designed to show how

the configurations either challenge or support the Universal Alignment Hypothesis, which, as stated by Perlmutter and Postal (1984), maintains that "there exist principles of universal grammar which predict the initial relation borne by each nominal in a given clause from the meaning of the clause" (p. 97).

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